

# The Founding of Rome

The Founding of Rome is very much embroiled in myth. Traces found by archaeologists of early settlements of the Palatine Hill date back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. This ties in very closely to the established legend that Rome was founded in 753 BC. Two founding legends exist - Romulus and Remus and Aeneas. Rather than contradict each other, the tale of Aeneas adds to that of Romulus and Remus.

## Romulus and Remus

**Ascanius**, the son of **Aeneas**, grew up and moved to another town, **Alba Longa**. It was located on the banks of the Tiber River in Italy. His descendant, **Numitor**, eventually became King. The legend says that **Numitor** was banished by his younger brother **Amulius**. To do away with any further possible contenders to the throne, **Amulius** murdered **Numitor's** sons and forced **Numitor's** daughter, **Rhea Silvia**, to become a Vestal Virgin. (Vestal Virgins were priestesses to the goddess Vesta and were expected to remain unmarried in the goddess' honor or be subjected to death.) However, **Mars**, the god of war became enchanted by her beauty, and, as a result of this, **Rhea Silvia bore twins, Romulus and Remus**. An enraged Amulius had Rhea Silvia thrown into the river Tiber where she was caught beneath the waves by the river god who married her.

The twins were set adrift on the river in a reed basket. They floated downstream until the basket was caught in the branches of a fig tree. This was where they were found by a she-wolf who suckled them until a shepherd found them. Another version of the same story tells of the shepherd finding them and taking them to his wife, who had just lost a stillborn child.



*Capitoline Museum, Rome*

As the two boys had grown to men in the care of the couple, they were told of their true origins. True to their heroic status they raised an armed and marched on **Alba Longa**. **Amulius** was slain in battle, and **Numitor** was restored to his throne. The twins decided to found a new city close to where they had been washed ashore, caught by the fig tree. The twins disputed which hill their city should be built on, Romulus favoring the Palatine, Remus choosing another. Taking the signs to read the will of the gods, Remus on his hill saw six birds, Romulus saw twelve. So it was decided that Romulus' choice was the right one, and he and his followers took to building their city on **Palatine Hill**. Remus, however, leapt over the walls. This was an ill omen suggesting the city's defenses could easily be overcome. **Remus** was slain, either by **Romulus** himself or by one of his chief followers.

## Aeneas

If the tale of Romulus and Remus appears the more popular Roman founding tale today, then the tale of Aeneas, harking back to yet earlier times, was perhaps the more popular in the days of the Roman Empire. In fact, through the writer, **Virgil**, the **Aeneid** became the national epic of the Roman empire and the most famous poem of the Roman era. Aeneas was to have been a hero fighting the Greeks in the Trojan wars. The son of Venus and a mortal father, he escaped as the great city of Troy was sacked. After quite an odyssey he landed in **Latium** through which the river Tiber flows. **Aeneas** married the daughter of **King Latinus**.



Aeneas having his wounds dressed in the presence of Venus. From a wall painting in Pompeii.  
*Museo della Civiltà, Rome*

The sack of Troy is dated to between 1100 and 1200 BC. To fill the years from Aeneas to Romulus the Romans therefore were required to produce a string of fictional Kings to make the tale work. This was done across all the generations with some ease from **Ascanius**, son of Aeneas, to **Numitor**, grandfather of Romulus and Remus.

## Historical Background



Model of archaic Roman round hut.

As such, the Latins settled in the wider area of Rome around 1000 BC, though those early settlements were not to be mistaken for anything like a city. They kept pigs, herded sheep, goats, cattle and lived in primitive, round huts. The rise of Rome was certainly not inevitable, but it had many advantages right from the start. Rome lies only a few miles from the sea with all its possibilities of trade. It lies central to the Italian peninsula, which in turn lies central to the entire Mediterranean Sea. Italy is guarded by the Alps to the North and by the sea all around.

Add to this the influence of the Greeks who were settling southern Italy, founding cities like Cumae and Tarentum, bringing advanced civilization to the country and you have a place with lots of potential. From the Greeks, the Romans learned fundamental skills such as reading and writing, and their religion is almost entirely derived from Greek mythology.

## The Roman Kings

Historical details are still too obscure for any definite records of Rome under the kings. Most of the story is mythical, but it was under the Roman Kings that the Roman ability to create an empire came to the forefront. In all, there was said to have been seven kings of Rome covering a period of over two hundred years.

### Romulus

The first recognized king of Rome was its mythical founder, Romulus, who founded **Rome** in 753 BC. To him is attributed the foundation of the Senate. He is also said to have ruthlessly pursued a policy of expanding the population, granting refuge and acceptance to criminals on the run.



### Numa Pompilius

Numa Pompilius came to power following the death of Romulus. He brought religion to the city.

### Tullus Hostilius

With the death of the peaceable Numa Pompilius, rule next fell to the warlike Tullus Hostilius. He expanded the Roman army.

### Ancus Marcius

Rome's fourth king was Numa Pompilius' grandson. He expanded the borders and brought a sense of peace to the city.

### Lucius Tarquinius Priscus (Tarquin the Elder)

The fifth king of Rome was one Lucius Tarquinius Priscus. He is credited with building the first sewer system, the Cloaca Maxima.

## Servius Tullius

The sixth king, Servius Tullius, was a monarch celebrated for particularly high achievement by the Romans. The Romans believed that during Servius' reign, the first use of coinage was seen in the city. Servius is also credited with creating the first census of the people.

## Lucius Tarquinius Superbus (Tarquin the Proud)

The seventh and final king of Rome was one Lucius Tarquinius Superbus. Tradition holds that Tarquin 'the Proud' was the son of Tarquin 'the Elder.' When the final revolution occurred, Tarquin was not in the city, but engaged in another military campaign. The early days of the Roman Republic saw a bitter struggle for independence against Tarquin's rule. Nonetheless Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the tyrant of Rome, would never achieve control again. The **Roman Monarchy** had fallen around 509 BC.

## The Early Roman Republic

The rebellion against Tarquinius failed to achieve final independence for Rome, but it proved to be the birth of the Roman Republic. It was after this revolt, that the **Senate** shared power with **two consuls**. The **Senators** were in office for life, while the consuls each held power for **one year**, in which they ruled much like joint kings of Rome. What also needs to be kept in mind is that this rebellion was indeed a revolt by the aristocracy of Rome. Rome was never a Democracy as we would understand it today, nor as the Greeks understood it. In the early days of the Roman republic all power would reside in the hands of the Roman aristocracy, the so-called patricians.

Rome was evidently the largest city within the area of Latium, and having defeated all of the opposing powers, Rome was now the head of Latium. The **Roman Republic** was a very successful government. It lasted from 509 BC until 31 BC - almost 500 years. Rome's most famous citizen was no doubt **Julius Caesar**. He was a Roman politician and general who, without having any orders to do so, conquered the vast territory of the Gauls to the north of his province in France. In the year 49 BC, Caesar crossed the small river between his province and Italy, called the river Rubicon, and conquered Rome itself which he then ruled as a **dictator**.

After Caesar was assassinated in 44 BC, many emperors followed him. Here are some of the most famous ones.	
<b>Augustus</b>	Declared <b>first Emperor</b> in 27 BC. He also added many territories to the <b>Empire</b> .
<b>Claudius</b>	He conquered Britain and improved Rome's judicial system
<b>Nero</b>	He was a sociopath. He murdered his mother and threw thousands of Christians to the lions.
<b>Titus</b>	Before he was Emperor, he destroyed the great Jewish temple of Solomon in Jerusalem.
<b>Trajan</b>	He was a great conqueror. Under his rule the Empire reached its greatest extent.
<b>Hadrian</b>	He built 'Hadrian's Wall' in the north of Britain to shield the province from the northern barbarians.
<b>Diocletian</b>	<b>He split the Empire into two parts</b> - a Western and an Eastern Empire 286 AD.
<b>Constantine</b>	<b>He was the first Christian Emperor.</b> He united the Empire again and chose his capital to be the small town Byzantium, which he renamed Constantinople.
<b>Romulus Augustus</b>	After his reign, the Germans controlled Rome. Around 476 AD, the Western Empire was lost.
<b>Justinian</b>	He was the first Byzantine emperor in the East. He conquered many territories and created the 'Justinian Code.'
<b>Constantine XI</b>	The last emperor of Constantinople. He died defending his great city against the Turks in 1453.

The Roman Empire in the end was **overrun by millions of “barbarians” from the north, east, and south**—the Huns, the Goths, the Franks, the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes, the Vandals, the Muslims, the Slavs, the Normans, the Persians, and the Turks. **It is believed to have happened two or three times in history that huge migrations took place across Europe, where people moved to settle in new territories. The great migration proved too much for the Romans to stem.** Their armies were designed to defeat other armies, not entire folks and people flooding toward them. Even as Rome was under attack from outside forces, **it was also crumbling from within thanks to a severe financial crisis.** Constant wars and overspending had significantly lightened imperial coffers, and oppressive taxation and inflation had widened the gap between rich and poor. With such a vast territory to govern, the empire faced an administrative and logistical nightmare. **Even with their excellent road systems, the Romans were unable to communicate quickly or effectively enough to manage their holdings.** Rome struggled to marshal enough troops and resources to defend its frontiers from local rebellions and outside attacks. **The collapse of the Western Empire was completed when Rome itself was conquered by the Visigoth Odoacer and his men in the year AD 476.** The Eastern “Roman” Empire began to flourish and became known as the **Byzantine Empire**. It was a

Christian empire, it had Roman law and administration, and it was based on Greek language, literature, and culture.